



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PUBLIC INVITED TO ATTEND INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS AND HEARINGS FOR PROPOSED BULL TROUT CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION AND DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be hosting a series of informational meetings and formal public hearings about the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath river distinct populations of bull trout and the draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and Montana's St. Mary-Belly River Basin.

The purpose of the open-house-style informational meetings is to provide the public an opportunity to gather information and submit written comments. Service personnel will be available to answer questions at each location.

The purpose of the formal public hearings will be for interested parties to present oral comments. All speakers must register to provide oral testimony. Service personnel will be available to answer questions in the information area at each hearing.

The public comment period for the proposed critical habitat designation and draft recovery plan opened November 29, 2002. The proposed critical habitat comment period will end January 28, 2003. The public comment period for the draft recovery plan will end February 27, 2003.

Meetings and hearings scheduled for Idaho are as follows:

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| • January 6 | Informational Meeting
4:00 pm to 7:00 pm | CHALLIS
Custer County Courthouse, 801 Main St. |
| • January 7 | Informational Meeting
10:00 am to 3:00 pm | SALMON
Salmon Valley Center, 200 Main St. |
| | Public Hearing
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm | <i>*Speaker registration begins at 5:30 pm</i> |
| • January 9 | Informational Meeting
10:00 am to 3:00 pm | LEWISTON
Red Lion Hotel, 621 21st St. |
| | Public Hearing
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm | <i>*Speaker registration begins at 5:30 pm</i> |
| • January 14 | Informational Meeting
10:00 am to 3:00 pm | BOISE
Ameritel Spectrum, 7499 W. Overland Rd. |
| | Public Hearing
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm | <i>*Speaker registration begins at 5:30 pm</i> |

Several other informational meetings and public hearings are scheduled in Montana, Oregon, and Washington throughout the month of January. A complete schedule of the meetings and hearings, as well as descriptions of the critical habitat proposal and draft recovery plan can be found on the Service's Region 1 website at <http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout>.

— FWS —

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses nearly 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.